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ABSTRACT

This report presents survey findings about the U.S. charter school system that were collected from 280 schools in 19 states with over 80,000 students. The two-part report examines the responses to a short list of questions about facility costs and growth plans, and it explores information provided by a subset of schools (118 institutions) that completed longer survey instruments covering a wider range of questions about schools' facilities experiences and challenges. Among the findings are that the majority of charter schools in the survey lease their facilities, that fewer than one in seven charter schools receive "free" facilities, and that the average cost for facilities is $191,553 or $690 per student. The study also found that charter school challenges may become more acute in coming years due to planned growth, that nearly six out of 10 responders indicated plans to expand their facilities, and that the average plan is for an increase in enrollment of 63 percent or higher. The report further details the types of facilities used by charter schools; facility ownership, size, and space sharing; experience of obtaining financing; and the limitations and challenges arising from facilities issues. An appendix contains information on how the data for the report was collected. (GR)

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Charter School Facilities:

Report from a national survey of Charter Schools

April 2001

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About this report...

Early in the history of the charter movement, finding and financing suitable facilities emerged as one of the most daunting challenges facing charter schools. For many reasons, charter schools face high costs for their facilities. Getting a building ready to house a school is expensive. Because charter schools are still relatively new, they may appear risky, so lenders and investors charge a premium for any financing they provide. And, in many states, charter schools lack access to tax-exempt financing, a mechanism that helps hold down costs for district schools.

At the same time, most charter schools have minimal revenue to make lease or loan payments for their facilities. Most state charter laws provide charter schools with operating funds, but fail to make any provision for capital expenses. Consequently, charter schools end up eating into their operating budgets in order to pay facilities costs, settle for inadequate facilities, or both.

To help address these challenges, Charter Friends National Network has played a key leadership role in addressing these issues since 1997. In the summer of that year, CFNN convened a national meeting on facilities financing in Minnesota, attended by school and friends group leaders, policymakers and leaders in the lending and investing world. Out of that conversation grew a multi-year initiative focusing on two goals: (1) enhancing the capacity of charter school operators to find and finance facilities; and (2) providing information to state and federal policymakers to help them craft policies that improve the facilities climate for charter schools.

This initiative has produced a series of publications, workshop presentations and other informational and technical assistance to charter operators, charter support organizations, financing organizations and policy-makers across the country. For more information on CFNN's facilities financing initiative — and to access copies of its publications and other resources — go to www.charterfriends.org.

Building on this past record of leadership, CFNN joined forces in early 2001 with Ksixteen, a leading developer of charter school facilities, to gather information on the facilities experiences of charter schools nation-wide. These two organizations distributed a survey — summarized in this report — that provides the first national systematic look at the facilities challenges charter schools now face. This report includes information from this survey that came from 280 schools in 19 states with over 80,000 students.

About the authors of this report...

This report was compiled by Public Impact for Charter Friends National Network and Ksixteen, with analysis and writing by Bryan Hassel and Barbara Page. Bryan Hassel, who directs Public Impact in Charlotte, N.C., is CFNN's lead consultant on facilities financing. Over the past three years, he has authored a series of CFNN publications and served as a technical assistance resource to charter school leaders, lenders and policy makers nationally and in a number of states. Barbara Page is a New York-based consultant who helped found the New York Charter School Association and has contributed to a variety of research projects on charter schools. She holds an MBA in Financing from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Charter School Facilities:

Report from a national survey of Charter Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2001, two organizations — Charter Friends National Network and Ksixteen — joined forces to gather information on the facilities experiences of charter schools nationwide. Charter Friends National Network is a Minnesota-based national network of grassroots charter support organizations (www.charterfriends.org). Ksixteen, headquartered in New York, N.Y., is a leading national developer of charter school facilities (www.ksixteen.com).

These results provide the first national systematic look at the facilities challenges charter schools face. This study includes information from 280 schools answering a short list of questions — 14% of all charter schools nationally, representing 19 states and over 80,000 students. Of these schools, 118 also responded to more detailed surveys. Here are the major findings from the analysis of the data:

- **Free facilities uncommon:** Only one in seven schools (13%) in the survey report that they inhabit no-cost facilities or pay token amounts.
- **Substantial resources devoted to facilities:** Among the respondents who do pay for their facilities, the average annual lease and/or loan payment for facilities totals $191,553. This amounts to 12% of the average school's overall budget.
- **Many spend more:** Nearly three in ten schools spend 15% or more of their funds on facilities, and one in ten spend 20% or more.
- **Nearly $700 per pupil:** Schools with loan or lease cost spend an average of $690 per student per year on these payments.
- **Schools plan significant growth:** Nearly six in ten respondents (58%) said that they plan either to move or to expand their facilities to accommodate future growth or current overcrowding. Among these, the typical school is planning for an ultimate enrollment that is 63% higher than its 2000-2001 enrollment.
- **Most schools lease:** More than seven in ten schools lease their facilities. Fewer than two in ten own their buildings, and the remaining schools have some other arrangement, typically occupying a district school building.
- **Creative arrangements:** Schools occupy a wide range of building types, but three in four locations listed fell into one of the following categories: custom built facilities, pre-existing public school buildings, offices, retail space, former private school buildings, or places of worship. Over one-third of schools relate that they share space with other organizations.

Major Findings:

- Free facilities uncommon
- Substantial resources devoted to facilities cost
- Nearly $700 on average is spent per student per year
- Schools are planning significant growth in coming years
- Most schools lease
- Creative arrangements are being made
- Schools have a wide range of facility sizes
- Arranging financing takes time

- **Wide range of facility sizes:** Schools range in size from 1,800 to 150,000 square feet, and the average school occupies 27,700 square feet — 103 square feet per student.

- **Arranging financing takes time:** Nearly one-third of schools spent from four to six months securing financing for their facility. However, it took nearly 10% of the schools more than 18 months.

- **Many financing strategies:** While most of the schools have arranged their financing from the traditional sources of corporate lending including bank loans, landlords, and bond proceeds, a number of schools have also accessed funds from government sources, such as the Department of Agriculture and the Small Business Administration. Other schools used their start-up/stimulus funds and still others relied on donations and fundraising.

OVERVIEW

Many studies have noted that finding and paying for facilities is one of the most difficult challenges facing charter schools. To date, however, there has been little national information available to help policymakers and others understand the nature and depth of these challenges.

To fill this information gap, two organizations — Charter Friends National Network and Ksixteen — joined forces to gather information on the facilities experiences of charter schools nationwide. Charter Friends National Network is a Minnesota-based national network of grassroots charter support organizations. Ksixteen, headquartered in New York, N.Y., is a leading national developer of charter school facilities. Details on how the information was collected are contained in Appendix A.

This report presents the results in two parts. Part I examines the findings from the responses of 280 charter schools to a short list of questions about their facilities costs and plans for growth. Part II explores the information provided by a subset of schools — 118 institutions that completed longer survey instruments covering a wider range of questions about schools' facilities experiences and challenges.

Facilities Cost:

- 280 charter schools from 19 states or about 14% of all charter schools participated in this survey
- The majority of charter schools in the survey lease their facilities
- Fewer than one in seven charter schools receive "free" facilities
- Average cost for facilities is $191,553 or $690 per student

PART I: FACILITIES COSTS — CURRENT AND FUTURE

Survey Participants

Part I of this report relies on the responses of **280 charter schools** from 19 states, about **14%** of all charter schools. These participants currently enroll **80,312 students**. The average school enrolled 287 students in 2000-2001, somewhat higher than the national average for charter schools.

Schools Leasing Facilities

The majority of charter schools in the survey lease their facilities. Specifically:

- **210 participants,** or 75% answered the question "Do you lease your facility?"
- Of those respondents, **79% said that they do lease their facilities.**

Schools Receiving Free Facilities

Few charter schools — fewer than one in seven — receive facilities for free. Of the 236 participants reporting school facility payment amounts, **13%, or 31 indicated that they do not pay for their facilities** (or pay a token amount such as $1 per year).

Schools Paying for Their Facilities

Schools that pay for their facilities devote a large amount of resources to their school buildings:

- Among the respondents who do pay for their facilities, **the average annual payment for leases and loans is $191,553.** Since the average charter school in the study was somewhat larger than the average charter school nationally, this figure

likely overstates the average annual cost of facilities in all charter schools.

- To adjust for that difference, researchers calculated the **per-pupil** cost of facilities incurred. These schools spend an average of **$690 per student per year** on lease and loan payments.
- As the chart below shows, many schools **spend significantly more than $690** per student per year on lease and loan payments:

PER PUPIL LEASE AND LOAN PAYMENTS

Per Pupil Facility Payments	Percent of Schools
$600 or more	27.9%
$800 or more	3.3%
$1,000 or more	2.2%

Plans for Growth:

- Charter facilities challenges may become more acute in coming years due to planned growth
- Nearly 6 out of 10 respondents indicated plans to expand their facilities
- The average plan is for an increase in enrollment 63% or higher

Facility Costs as a Percent of Total Expenditures

In addition to being large in dollar terms, facilities expenditures also consume a significant portion of the typical charter school's budget:

- 214 survey participants gave both facility cost and overall student spending data. Among those respondents who pay for their facilities, schools **spend an average of 12% of their budgets on lease and loan payments.**
- Many schools **spend significantly more than 12%** of their budgets on facilities. The breakdown follows:

PERCENT OF BUDGET SPENT ON LEASE AND LOANS PAYMENTS

Facility Payment as Percent of Budget	Percent of Schools
15% or more	27.9%
20% or more	10.9%
25% or more	3.8%

Plans for Growth

Charter schools' facilities challenges may become more acute in the coming years because most are planning for significant growth:

- **Nearly six in ten respondents (58%) said that they plan either to move or to expand their facilities** to accommodate future growth or current overcrowding.
- Among these schools, the typical school is planning for an **ultimate enrollment that is 63% higher** than its 2000-2001 enrollment.

PART II: FACILITY TYPES, SIZES, AND EXPERIENCES

This section explores the more detailed information provided by a subset of the larger sample — 118 schools that completed a longer survey instrument.

Survey Participants

This part of the report relies on the responses of **118 charter schools** from 18 states, about 6% of all charter schools. These participants currently enroll **36,353 students**. The average school enrolled 311 students in 2000-2001, which again is slightly more than the national average for charter schools. (See Appendix A for sampling information.)

Types of Facilities Used by Charter Schools

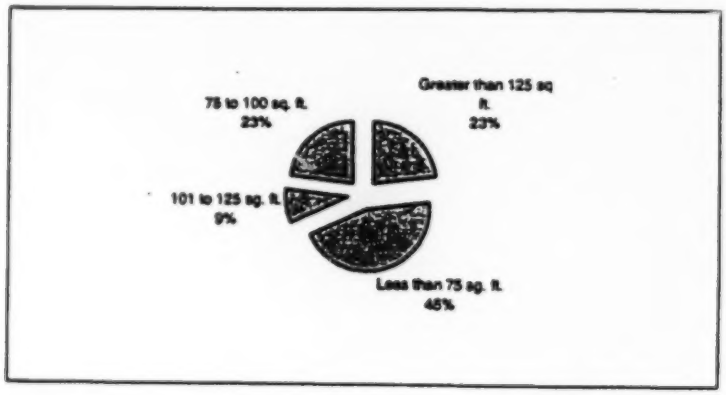
The schools occupy a wide-range of building types. Three in four however, fell into one of the following categories: custom built facilities, pre-existing public school buildings, offices, retail space, former private school buildings, or places of worship. The answers varied as follow:

BUILDING TYPE PRIOR TO OCCUPATION BY THE CHARTER SCHOOL

Building Type	Number of Charter School Representatives	Percent of Total
Custom Built	25	19.1%
Former Public School	20	15.3%
Office	16	12.2%
Retail Space/Strip Mall	15	11.5%
Former Private School	14	10.7%
Church	8	6.1%
Community Building	6	4.6%
Other Public Building	6	4.6%
College/University Building	5	3.8%
Warehouse	5	3.8%
Factory	3	2.3%
Private Home	3	2.3%
Catering Hall/Social Club	2	1.5%
Convent	2	1.5%
Nursing Home	1	0.8%

Facility Size

Facilities range from 1,800 square feet to 150,000 square feet. The average facility size is **27,700 square feet**, or **103 square feet per student**. However, nearly half of the schools have less than 75 square feet per student.

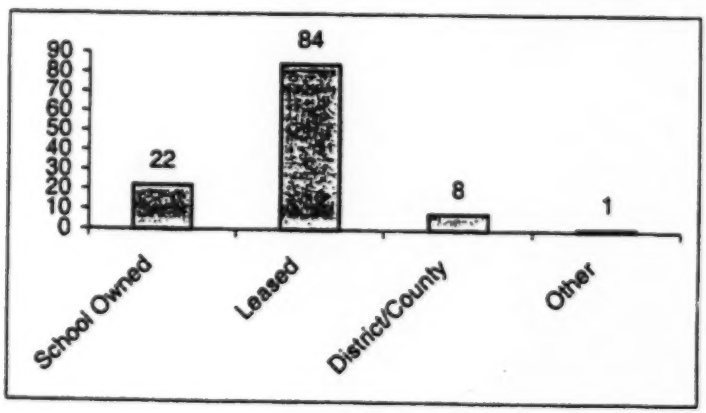


Sharing Space

36% of the survey participants report sharing their facility with another organization.

Ownership of Facilities

Nineteen percent of survey respondents said that they do own their buildings. Seven percent occupy district or county owned buildings, and 73% lease their buildings.



Experience Obtaining Financing

The most common amount of time for a school to secure its facility financing was four to six months. However, it did take nearly 10% of the schools more than 18 months.

LENGTH OF TIME TO SECURE FINANCING

Length of Time	Number of Charter School Responses	Percent of Total
Less than 1 month	4	6.0%
1-3 months	12	17.9%
4-6 months	22	32.8%
7-9 months	6	9.0%
10-12 months	13	19.4%
13-18 months	4	6.0%
More than 18 months	6	9.0%

Ways to obtain financing:

- Bank loan
- Landlord Financing
- Bond Proceeds
- Startup/Stimulus Funds
- Donations
- District/State Funds

There are a number of different ways in which the charter schools financed the purchase, construction, and renovation of their facilities.

Bank Loan/Landlord Financing/Bond Proceeds: The majority of schools report arranging financing from the traditional sources of landlords, banks, and the proceeds from bond offerings.

Start-up/Stimulus Funds: Five schools report using their start-up and stimulus funds for the purchase, construction, or renovation of their facilities. Another school reported receiving $400,000 for the purchase of their facility and another $400,000 for the construction of their facility from the school founder.

Donations: Four schools report doing fundraising to pay for their facilities. The schools raised from $25,000 to $4,000,000.

District/State Funds: Three schools report receiving interest-free loans from school districts or their states. These loans ranged from $125,000 to $150,000 for construction and renovation.

The chart below outlines a number of the financing arrangements.

Facility Financing Options Vary:

- Charter schools can choose between USDA, EDA, city, private, bank and a variety of other loan venues
- Charter schools generally choose to purchase, construct, mortgage and/or renovate their facilities
- Terms can be as short as 1 year to as long as 30 years

VARIOUS LOAN FACILITY FINANCING ARRANGEMENTS

Source	# of Loans	Purpose of Loans	Amount (Range)	Interest Rate (Range)	Term (Range)
Bank Loan	28	Purchase, Construction/ Mortgage, Renovation	$50,000 to $2,750,000	6.7% to 14.0%	1 to 30 years
United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)	6	Purchase, Construction/ Mortgage, Renovation	$38,000 to $600,000	6.0% to 7.0%	All loans either 5 or 30 years
Landlord	5	Purchase, Construction/ Mortgage, Renovation	$50,000 to $590,000	11.0% to 21.0%	2 to 15 years
Loan from proceeds of an Industrial Development Authority (IDA) bond insurance	4	Construction/ Mortgage, Renovation	$12,200,000 to $20,275,000	4.24% to 8.0%	20 to 30 years
Small Business Administration (SBA)	2	Purchase, Renovation	$350,000 to $600,000	4.0% to 10.0%	25 to 30 years
Private loan	2	Renovation	$14,500 to $150,000	10.0%	5 years
City Loan	1	Construction/ Mortgage	$700,000	5.0%	15 years
State Economic Development Administration (EDA)	1	Construction/ Mortgage	$4,108,000	5.0%	20 years

Limitations and Challenges Arising from Facilities Issues

In an open-ended question, schools were asked how an outside organization could have provided expert help throughout the entire charter school process. Fifty percent of the responses can be categorized as either "Financing Options" or "Financing/ Funding." The responses have been summarized in the following table:

Areas of Expert Assistance That Would be Helpful to Charter Schools

State Specific Assistance	Financing Options
• State specific information and decoding of the charter law (2) • State funding for building and facilities • Interfacing with state Department of Ed & legislature • Granting organization • Negotiating charter for maximum lease aid • Grant administration	• Financing options (3) • Locating an affordable facility (2) • Low cost loans (2) • Securing intial facilities • Securing permanent facilities • Acquiring to buy or build a facility • Financial aid
Planning	**Financing/Funding**
• Business plan/financial planning (6) • Facilities (6) • Facility planning/feasibility (3) • Facility expansion planning (2) • Facility location • Long-term facility location	• Finance/Financing (19) • Financing land/building/construction of permanent facilities (5) • Development of private funding sources (including grant writing) (5) • Facility financing (2) • Additional start-up funding • Funding transition from revenue limit model to charter block funding • Budget sources
Charter School Management	**Building/Construction**
• Financial accounting systems/set-up (3) • Grounds upkeep/general maintenance • Business/professional services (2) • Technology assistance and funding (2) • Attendance tracking and maintenance • Day-to-Day school management assistance • Special Ed • Recruitment • Recruiting students	• Building (2) • Assistance with hiring, negotiation, managing the building contracts, subcontractors, architect, etc. (2) • A guide of resources and an outline of the buying and construction process • Building construction

Expert Assistance Desired for:

- State Specific Programs
- Planning
- Management
- Financing
- Funding
- Building/Construction

Survey participants were also asked which additional initiatives they would undertake if they had facilities that no longer compromised their current education programs. Of all the responses, only five reported "none," and two were unsure. The most common response was to add a library/media center, followed closely by a gymnasium/athletic program and upgrading technology/adding computers. The responses can be summarized as follows:

Initiatives Desired:

- Various programs added or expanded
- Other expansions and building opportunities
- Facility enhancements
- Miscellaneous school enhancements

Initiatives that Schools Would Like to Undertake

Program Enhancements

- Add/expand athletic program or extra-curricular sports (9)
- Add/expand art program (5)
- Add/expand physical education program (5)
- Full-year scheduling/summer school programs (4)
- Add/expand fine art program (4)
- Expand science program (4)
- Add computers/technology offerings (3)
- Add pre-K (3)
- Add/expand before/after-school program (3)
- Expand enrichment programs
- Theater performance
- Add honors classes
- Environmental field work (2)
- Outdoor activities
- Vocational training
- More services for special needs children
- More subject "specials"
- Special Education resources

Other School Enhancements

- Increase student enrollment (8)
- Add additional grades (6)
- Further parent resources/community outreach (4)
- Restructure debt from short to long-term
- Develop a foundation to pay for a larger facility
- Tutorials
- Better facilities for teachers
- Parking
- Transportation

Other Building/Facility Enhancements

- Library/media center (10)
- Gymnasium (9)
- Upgrade technology/additional computer labs/classroom computers (8)
- Science lab (7)
- Playground (5)
- Auditorium (5)
- Multi-use performance/meeting/art space (4)
- Expand facilities (3)
- Athletic fields (3)
- Upgrade existing classroom space/ facilities (3)
- Cafeteria/lunchroom (3)
- Build a new school/search for a new facility (2)
- Labs-undefined (2)
- Kitchen (2)
- Wire classrooms
- Upgrade bathrooms
- Expansion
- Shop for building trades and automotives
- Air conditioners

In an open-ended question, survey participants were asked, "Given your current situation, what immediate facility needs does your school have?" Of all the responses, only ten reported "none." The responses can be summarized as follows:

Charter School Immediate Facility Needs

Program Enhancements

- Gymnasium (18)
- Playground/play space/outdoor space (12)
- Library/media center (9)
- Auditorium/performance hall/ theater (8)
- Science lab (8)
- More computers/computer lab (5)
- Athletic fields/program (4)
- Visual arts education facility/ program (3)
- Music room/program (3)
- Technology (3)
- Remodeled recreation areas/ gymnasium (2)
- Language lab
- Drama program
- Tutoring program
- Common room labs
- Special education space
- Reading lab
- Basketball court

Other Building Enhancements

- Storage/book shelves
- Cafeteria/lunch room (7)
- Multipurpose room (3)
- More office/administration space (2)
- Additional desks/chairs (2)
- Parking (2)
- Renovate classrooms (2)
- Conference room
- Landscaping
- Running water in classrooms
- Elevator
- Additional restrooms
- Teachers room
- Kitchen

Overall Needs

- Larger/expanded facility (16)
- More class space/classrooms/ larger classrooms (11)
- Identification of an appropriate permanent site (7)
- More classrooms (6)
- New campus for additional classes (4)
- Renovation of current building systems/HVAC/roof (4)
- Space for future enrollment (3)
- Single campus for all students (3)
- New facility—current one is being sold/no longer available (2)
- New facility (2)

Financing Needs

- Funds for needed renovations (4)
- Funds for completion of current renovation/construction project (2)
- Additional funding (2)
- Funds to purchase current facility
- Funds for continued maintenance of facility
- Financing
- Less costly lease
- Less spending of the dollars on the building and more on the curriculum

Immediate Needs:

- Programs added or expanded
- Building restructuring or additions
- General needs
- Financing needs

APPENDIX A:
HOW THE INFORMATION WAS COLLECTED

In three states (Massachusetts, Colorado, and Illinois), other organizations had already conducted surveys asking the same or similar questions to those CFNN and Ksixteen wished to ask. CFNN and Ksixteen obtained the results of these surveys and supplemented them with responses from additional states. A written survey was mailed to 940 charter schools across the country drawn from the Center for Education Reform's *National Charter School Directory*. All schools with 300 or more students received the survey, as well as a random selection of other schools with 75-299 students. Recipients could respond by mailing in the paper survey or completing an online version of the survey. All respondents received a $10 gift certificate from Amazon.com for completing the survey. Nationally, 78 schools responded to the survey via written submission or the web. To augment this number, CFNN and Ksixteen asked charter school technical assistance organizations to follow-up with survey recipients by telephone and ask a short list of questions about facilities costs and plans for growth. Nationally, 87 additional schools responded to this short list of questions with useable answers.

Full copies of all instruments and other details of the survey may be obtained by sending an email request to: survey@publicimpact.com.

ABOUT Ksixteen

Ksixteen LLC is a New York based company that was formed in 2000 from the real estate department of Edison Schools Inc. Since 1997, the Ksixteen team has managed part or all of over 125 school construction projects worth over $250, including forty charter schools with a combined enrollment of approximately 20,000 students. With expertise in real estate development, financing, design and construction and facility management, Ksixteen's mission is to provide a highly responsive, efficient and comprehensive program to meet the real estate, financing, design and construction, and technology needs of educational institutions and managers. For more information, contact: Ksixteen LLC 529 Fifth Avenues, New York, NY 10017. Phone: 212-419-1625. Email: info@ksixteen.com — Website: www.ksixteen.com

About the growing role of "Charter Friends..."

Charter schools depend on the passion and commitment of their founders and their determination to address the educational needs of the students and communities they serve. But even the best charter founders and operators cannot succeed entirely in isolation. They require an infrastructure of technical and informational support to help design quality schools, obtain charters to launch and successfully sustain their operations.

In response to these needs, a number of state and sub-state charter support organizations are emerging throughout the country. Some of these organizations were initially established to help build public awareness and legislative support for passing a charter school law. Once laws are passed, these groups tend to focus their attention on recruiting and assisting charter applicants and providing charter operators ongoing technical assistance and other forms of support.

These so-called "Charter Friends" organizations assist charters with a variety of issues and needs including school planning, governance, financing curriculum, assessment and accountability, facilities and other critical aspects of starting and running high quality schools. Most are privately funded non-profit organizations, but they sometimes charge fees to help cover the cost of their operations. They attract fiscal and administrative support from foundations, businesses, think tanks, academic institutions and individuals. Some have a membership base of schools in their states. They are most often organized at a state level, but sometimes have a more narrow geographic focus within a state.

About the Charter Friends National Network...

Just as no charter school can succeed in total isolation, state and sub-state "Charter Friends" organizations have found value in the relationships and support they gain from each other. With charter schools now authorized in 36 states and the District of Columbia, both the number of these organizations and the potential for mutual shared support have grown rapidly. In response, the Charter Friends National Network (CFNN) was established in late 1996 as a project of the Minnesota-based Center for Policy Studies in cooperation with Hamline University in St. Paul.

CFNN's mission is to promote the charter opportunity by helping to start and strengthen resource centers and other state-level charter support organizations. CFNN pursues its mission through publications, meetings, on-line communications, a grant program and multi-state initiatives on high priority issues. These initiatives currently include accountability, facilities financing, special education and federal policy development. CFNN also coordinates "National Charter Schools Week."

Charter Friends National Network began as an expansion of the work of Ted Kolderie, senior associate at the Center for Policy Studies, and a leader in the national charter movement from its beginning. Its director is Jon Schroeder, a veteran Minnesota policy analyst and former journalist who played a major role in the design and passage of the federal charter grant program as policy director for former U.S. Senator Dave Durenberger. A third founder was Eric Premack, who heads the Charter Schools Development Center at California State University in Sacramento and is one of the nation's top experts on charter school policy and operations. Several nationally-known consultants are also engaged to work on specific CFNN initiatives.

For more information on CFNN and its activities, contact Charter Friends National Network, 1295 Bandana Boulevard, Suite 165, St. Paul, MN 55108; 651-644-6115 (phone) 651-644-0433 (fax); info@charterfriends.org (e-mail) or www.charterfriends.org (web site).

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connecting and supporting grassroots charter school initiatives

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